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## Poetic Re-presentations on Trust in Higher Education

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# Poetic Re-presentations on Trust in Higher Education

## Abstract

This article discusses using poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) as a tool for examining trust, including what trust looks and feels like from the “lived experiences” (Richardson, 1992) of university educators. We first explore the rationale for using poetic transcription in this study, discussing how and why poetry may be used as a profound narrative tool (Wells, 2004). This is followed by an overview of the methodology of poetic representation (after Butler-Kisber, 2010; Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 2003). Next, we present selected poems from three different educators (a retired teacher, graduate student teacher, and teacher/administrator). We discuss critical insights and perspectives on trust, including ways that poems can evoke emotion, build empathy, and elicit deeper understandings of the topic at hand (Cannon Poindexter, 2002; Clunis D’Andrea, 2013; Eisner, 1997; Faulkner, 2007; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006). We conclude by discussing some of reasons why poetry is ideally suited for broadening the horizons of educational research.

Dans cet article, nous traitons de l’emploi de la transcription poétique (Glesne, 1997) en tant qu’outil pour examiner la confiance, y compris la manière dont la confiance paraît et se ressent à partir d’« expériences vécues » (Richardson, 1992) par des éducateurs universitaires. Tout d’abord, nous explorons pourquoi nous avons utilisé la transcription poétique dans cette étude, nous discutons comment et pourquoi la poésie peut être utilisée en tant qu’outil narratif profond (Wells, 2004) pour découvrir le cœur de la confiance. Ensuite, nous présentons un aperçu de la méthodologie de la représentation poétique (après Butler-Kisber, 2010; Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 2003). Puis nous présentons quelques poèmes choisis de trois éducateurs différents (un professeur à la retraite, un étudiant diplômé enseignant et un enseignant/administrateur). Nous discutons les idées critiques et les perspectives sur la confiance, y compris les diverses manières dont les poèmes peuvent évoquer l’émotion, faire éprouver l’empathie et susciter une compréhension plus profonde sur le sujet à l’étude (Cannon Poindexter, 2002; Clunis D’Andrea, 2013; Eisner, 1997; Faulkner, 2007; Furman, Lietz et Langer, 2006). En conclusion, nous discutons quelques-unes des raisons pour lesquelles la poésie se prête de façon idéale à la recherche en éducation.

## Keywords

poetic transcription, poetic re-presentation, poetic inquiry, trust, higher education

The following poem, titled “A Trusting Relationship” is a vignette, a poetic re-presentation drawn from the transcript of a teacher/administrator who was interviewed for our qualitative research study on trust. Using a conversational tone and emphasizing different words from the transcript, it attempts to transmit the emotions, speaking style and mannerisms that were exhibited at the same time as the interview:

### **A Trusting Relationship**

I have had many wonderful conversations  
with my graduate students,  
but not always comfortable ones.

How about if your thesis advisor said,  
I don't know if this methodology is going to work or not.  
But I can go with this.  
I like the direction. It's out there a little bit.  
You are pushing the envelope a bit.  
I think you should but have courage  
because I'm not sure everybody is going to agree with us on that.

I've said those very things to students I've supervised.  
Is your work solid?

*Yes.*

Will you have to defend it?

*Probably.*

But that's what a defense is all about.

If you are willing to follow what you are doing there,  
you have my support,  
you have my experience that says,  
Yes, I think this can be defended  
but you are going to have to be the one to defend it.

That is a different kind of conversation.  
It's a respectful conversation.  
It's a collegial conversation.  
It's not a paternal conversation at that point.  
And sometimes people want a paternal conversation.  
So sometimes you have to read your audience...  
the person you are working with.

It's like saying,  
"Do you want me to take you back on the safe path  
because I can do that.  
I'll take you somewhere else than  
where you are going right now.

And I can pretty well guarantee that this is going to go smoothly.  
Or I will walk with you on the path that's wooded,  
shadowed  
*and a little scary for both of us?"*

It comes back to the nature of a trusting relationship.

By reducing your authority and control,  
by eliminating some of that and handing it over –  
it's welcoming a level of trust that's profoundly different  
than the trust that you have all the right answers for me.

This poem represents a style of expressive writing discussed and demonstrated at length throughout this paper, which itself is derived from a research technique known as poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997). Poetic transcription involves the culling and reorganizing of original words and phrases from interview transcripts followed by the use of literary devices such as line, meter, repetition, and pauses to craft artistic renditions (Richardson, 2003). The re-presentations are often referred to as “found poetry” (Mandrona, 2010; Wells, 2004) or “participant-based poetry” (Prendergast, 2009) because the exact words of participants are used in compressed form (Faulkner, 2007). In contrast, interpretive and investigative poetry integrate the researcher's response to the data along with the participant's for a deliberate fusing of perspectives (Mandrona, 2010). In addition, some authors have begun using the term “poetic inquiry” (McCulliss, 2013) to refer to research methods that creatively combine the writing of poetry or thinking poetically with the inquiry process.

There has been a growing interest in poetic transcription and other forms of poetic inquiry since the work of sociologist Laurel Richardson in the early 1990s (Richardson, 1992). Writing poetry or even incorporating poetic ways of thinking and knowing into research, however, is still considered an “experimental” practice by many. In academia, each discipline has its own norms and values that influence what counts as research (Eisner, 1997; Richardson, 1992). Richardson (1992) writes: “Like other cultural groups, academics fail to recognize their practices as cultural/political choices, much less see how they are personally affected by those practices” (p.126). Educational studies that rely on formal methods to examine processes, behaviours, methods, and curriculum, for instance, far outnumber those using poems or other forms of non-prosaic writing to explore affective interactions, nuances, or experiences (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Emergent research practices, such as poetic inquiry, are sometimes devalued because they do not follow ingrained epistemological norms or academic practices (Eisner, 1997; Glesne, 1997; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008; Richardson; 1992). However, this is beginning to change as more educational and social science researchers use methods from the literary, visual, and performing arts, and as these researchers begin to examine issues of culture, power, and authority in new ways (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009; Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 2000).

Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) suggest that “a phenomenon as complex as trust requires theory and research methodology that reflect trust's many facets and levels” (p. 393). Poetry is one means to discuss the more nuanced dimensions of a topic such as trust. These poems not only reveal critical insights and perspectives of our

participants, they also aim to convey intrinsic details of feelings, critical experiences, and/or epiphanies in their lived experiences. Dobson (2010) writes:

I want to convey the invisible, immeasurable, the intrinsic as essential elements of education. I feel that half the picture has been left out of the educational equation because we haven't been able, or quite ready, perhaps, to talk about things like "intuition" or "heart" or "soul." Scholarly writing with its matter-of-fact intellectual tone can be a harsh medium for the expression of the delicate and passionate matters of the heart...(p.141).

Thus, the use of poetry is only one of many possibilities on the horizon for re-envisioning the methods of research. As expressed in the words of a research participant in the re-presented poem "Moral Courage," poetry offers something "profoundly different" to the world of educational research. When using poetry, researchers must be willing to trust the process more than finding the right answer. Poetry is meant to focus on different questions and contribute a new narrative to how knowledge is perceived and created. Our re-presented poems are shared with the intent to focus on our participant's lived experiences of trust. While each reader's reaction will be different, the poems are meant to evoke emotion and dialogue, build empathy, and elicit deeper understandings of the topic at hand (Cannon Poindexter, 2002; Eisner, 1997; Faulkner, 2007; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006). In the discussion that follows, we explore how and why poetry is such a profound narrative tool (Wells, 2004) and the reasons why it is ideally suited for expanding the horizons of educational research.

### Our Research Goals

*"The environment that I work in also has to be about trust. I have to feel trusted in my job in order to be successful." (Clunis D'Andrea, 2013, p. 86).*

In an educational context, consider: the undergraduate student who believes her teacher will assign her a fair mark, the experienced teacher who places his trust in his institution and in the academic work he is contributing, the new teacher who trusts herself enough to know she will be able to teach on her first day, the colleague who turns to a trusted friend for advice, and the student whose spirits lift when he realizes his teacher truly cares about and believes in his potential. These examples illustrate the complex and dynamic roles that trust plays in learning, relationships, and the workplace.

Rather than predefine what trust is or isn't, our study decided to explore what trust looks and feels like from a teaching perspective within the university. As we pored over the scholarly literature, we found that much of the research focused on interpersonal trust between teachers or students and/or its relation to learning (Brookfield, 1990; Clunis D'Andrea, 2013; Corrigan & Chapman, 2008; Curzon-Hobson, 2002; Deiro, 1996; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Gewertz, 2002; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Jackson, 1994; Shore, 2003; Tierney, 2006; Wheelless & Grotz, 1977). Noting the centrality of this relationship in the literature, we felt it might be interesting to further explore how trust between teachers and students contributes to the overall culture of

trust in the university. We also wanted to explore what actively encourages or discourages a culture of trust and its implications for creating a positive learning and work environment.

We began our research by talking to experienced, successful, and/or reflective university teachers with at least five years of experience teaching who were interested in the topic of trust. We followed the criteria provided by the 3M National Teaching Fellowship in Canada at the time to define successful teaching, which is excellence in teaching over a number of years, principally (but not exclusively) at the undergraduate level and commitment to the improvement of university teaching, with emphasis on contributions beyond the nominee's discipline or profession to as broad an audience as possible. Invitations to participate in the initial study were sent to 3M Teaching Fellows in research-intensive universities across Western Canada.

In total we interviewed six people (four men; two women). After interviewing three experienced teachers, we revised our study to include a teacher with administrative/research responsibilities, a graduate student teacher, and a new teacher (pre-tenure). Before the interview, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire intended to help them to reflect on different aspects of trust within their classroom practice and related to the university setting. During semi-structured interviews that tended to follow the flow of conversation we focused on three main questions:

1. What does trust mean to you?
2. What tends to limit trust within the university?
3. What do you do to try and work around these limiting factors?

In addition, we asked the participants to reflect on the actions they took and the value they placed on trust in facilitating the learning process in terms of three different relationships:

1. **Teacher-self relationship:** When you teach in a university environment what have you done or what do you currently do that demonstrates your trust in yourself? From your perspective, why might trust in yourself be important for facilitating learning within the university?
2. **Teacher-student relationship:** When you teach in a university environment what have you done or what do you currently do that demonstrates your trust in your students? From your perspective, why might trust in your students be important for facilitating learning within the university?
3. **Teacher-administrator relationship:** When you teach in a university environment what have you done or what do you currently do that demonstrates your trust in university administrators? From your perspective, why might trust in university administrators be important for facilitating learning within the university? What advice would you give a new university teacher related to encouraging trusting relationships within the university? What would you like to be able to do to strengthen trust within the university? What kinds of support do you need to achieve those goals?

## Methodology

One of the main goals of poetic transcription is to carefully reconstruct the thoughts, feelings, insights, and perspectives of participants as they are gleaned from the research data, using the participants' own language, essence and style of speaking (Glesne, 1997; Leavy, 2009; Richardson, 2003). In this sense the poems that are crafted in this manner are "research poems" that merge qualitative data with the craft and rules of traditional or "lyrical" poetry (Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Leavy, 2009; McCulliss, 2013). This analysis of research data and its crafting into poems is an inductive process similar in approach to grounded theory (Leavy, 2009).

One of the major criticisms associated with poetic transcription is that authors fail to be explicit about the process they use to arrive at poetic re-presentations (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009). Glesne (1997) wrote extensively on the process of poetic transcription, sharing line-by-line excerpts from original transcripts and re-presented poems while acknowledging there is no one correct way to do poetic transcription. She says: "The process described here is not *the* way to do poetic transcription; rather it is one way... I might create different rules next time, and the poetic vignettes would assume different forms" (p. 205).

Another criticism faced is the question of validity since poetic transcription does not conform to traditional measures (Nagy, Hesse-Biber, & Leavy, 2008). To counter this, Richardson (2000) has constructed useful guidelines for reviewing ethnographic work. In addition, Faulkner (2007) has composed a list of scientific, artistic, and poetic criteria that have been useful in shaping the poems throughout this work. However, inherent within the process is the knowledge that researchers and readers may interpret the poems in multiple ways. Richardson (2003) points out: "...people tell stories about events in their lives, and the meanings of these events change through the invocation of different narratives" (p. 880). Therefore, the point of poetic transcription is not to arrive at a final destination, but rather to explore the many paths that may lead the way.

The specific methods used in our study had five stages: coding and identification of themes, condensing and synthesizing of words, shaping of words into makeshift poems, shaping of makeshift poems into re-presented poems, and cross-checking between co-authors and research participants. Since poetic transcription is a reflexive process for both researchers and participants (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 2003), there was time allotted between each of the stages as well as at the end for cross checking, reflection, and discussion.

The first stage of poetic transcription begins with interview transcripts and involves "studying the interview transcripts looking for themes and recurring language, then drawing out exact words and phrases out of the data. The selected words and phrases become the basis of the poem (Leavy, 2009, p.75). In this stage, we conducted interviews with participants who had expressed interest in our study, which were then tape-recorded and transcribed. To code the transcripts, we followed a process similar to the one described by Furman and colleagues (2006). To begin, we familiarized ourselves with the text in the transcripts, noting our general impressions but refraining from making any notes on potential themes. In a subsequent round, we read and re-read the transcripts, making notes, and conducting line-by-line analyses of the text. After a period of reflection, we met to discuss and reflect upon the recurring themes.

In the second stage, our methods became intuitive, as we grappled with the challenging task of simultaneously condensing and synthesizing words and passages from the text. To accomplish this, we began copying phrases, sentences, and paragraphs from the transcripts to an outline without making changes to any of the words. We read and re-read the transcripts and made notes in an attempt to synthesize the interconnectedness of the narrative and to connect passages of text to recurring themes.

In the third stage, we selected phrases, sentences, and paragraphs representing the themes from the transcripts into a form that we referred to as makeshift poems. Though the makeshift poems were temporary, they were important in providing an overall context and chronology for the phrases, sentences, and paragraphs excerpted from the transcripts.

The fourth stage of our research involved shortening the lengthy makeshift poems into re-presented poems focusing on the “essence” or main themes from the participant’s narrative. This process involved carefully reading and re-reading, then reflecting, and finally selecting the passages within the makeshift poems that represented a critical, transformative, or significant moment in the lives of participants (Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006), especially those that conveyed epiphanies, feelings, contradictions, dualities, or paradoxes (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009; Richardson, 2003). In this stage, we followed two rules after Glesne (1997). First, the words in the poems were the same words expressed by participants in the interviews. Only minor changes were made to these words when required, including changing tenses or pronouns, dropping or adding word endings, and in rare instances adding connecting words to assist with the flow and rhythm (Glesne, 2005). To give us some flexibility in creating the re-presented poems, phrases from the interview transcripts were juxtaposed together if they kept true to the original context, meaning, and chronology in the interview transcripts.

In the fourth stage we began to shape the poetic re-presentations using the creative aspects of formal poetry described by Richardson (2003) and in more detail by Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) and Oliver (1994). For example, we used rhythm, repeating phrases, end stops, punctuation, and short lines to draw attention to specific lines in the poems and to speed up or slow down the pace of our poems. This was balanced by our attempt to stay as true as possible to the speaking style of our participants- emulating their natural rhythms, pauses, and speaking mannerisms within the style and formatting of the poems. We deliberately used blank spaces within our poems to highlight the choice of words and to attend to the visual layout of the poem. We used metaphors from the transcripts to evoke imagery and to convey the feelings that were experienced by the participants during the initial interviews.

Between the fourth and fifth stages, the co-authors met to discuss and revise each other’s work. We then compiled two sets of poems- written separately by each co-author organizing them under each of the themes identified from the coded transcripts. Cahnmann-Taylor (2009) writes, “A poetic approach to inquiry also understands that writing up research is a part of a critical iterative feedback loop that informs ongoing decision making in the field” (p. 19). As a result, we asked the participants from our study to read and select the poems that more closely represented the message they were trying to convey, their speaking mannerisms, and the tone (emotions, feelings) conveyed during the initial interviews. After reflecting on the re-presented poems, one of our participants articulates the process best:



It is your grouping of different comments together- condensing them into themes- that makes the poem forms evocative for me. The poem form shows strands- themes- interlaced originally throughout the interview, now brought together in one place. The poem form also seems to shift from the interview as responses to questions about past practices to relational themes in the present. These poems have a kind of narrative quality to them- making them happening now for me, even though these practices and situations took place years ago. This form also shifts the context for the reader- from something you as interviewers obtained in an interview as "data" to 1st person accounts that are personal, specific and meaningful narratives. These forms seems to make "trust" live in relationships, and not simply as an abstract property of teaching, learning, and classrooms that makes them work better... (anonymous participant, personal communication, 2010).

In any research that we do, we must first as researchers earn the trust of our participants. This is especially important when using poetic re-presentation because the process asks research participants to be vulnerable in ways they may never have experienced before. For instance, not only do participants share their words, insights, and critical moments related to trust (which may, in and of itself, be an incredibly vulnerable act), they also share another side of themselves via their emotions and speaking styles. Thus, a key part of the process is for researchers to identify specific strategies for building trust and reciprocity with participants (Dance, Gutiérrez, & Hermes, 2010; Prendergast, 2009). We suggest actively involving participants in a consultative manner beyond the interview stage, juxtaposing periods of writing and reflection with opportunities to clarify and exchange information and solicit reflection and feedback on the poems as they are being written.

### Examining Trust: Selected Poems

*Different foci “extend, energize, and bring out previously unseen aspects of the objects of our interest.” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p.400)*

Richardson (2003) writes, “Poetry’s task is to re-present actual experiences- episodes, epiphanies, misfortunes, pleasures; to retell those experiences in such a way that others can experience and feel them” (p. 197). Here, we present several poems representing the perspectives from three university educators at different career stages: Michael, a retired tenured professor/administrator, Megan, a graduate student teacher, and James, a tenured professor/administrator. To protect the anonymity of research participants, pseudonyms are used.

When we asked our participants to define trust, sometimes they provided us with a definition, but more often than not, they described trust as a place in the body, often pointing to the heart. As a result, we quickly discovered that while trust may be described objectively, it is also *felt*. A formal definition of trust gleaned from Wheelless and Grotz (1977) is: “Trust is the process of holding certain relevant, favorable perceptions of a person” (p. 251). Themes in our study represent both thoughts and feelings from the three educators; they were derived from ideas repeatedly expressed in the poems and depict the

multiple themes that make up a much broader definition of trust. The first set of poems, including “I Think Students Are Heroic,” “Trusting Others,” and “What Music Do You March to?” focus on the emotional journey of trust over time including its role in enhancing learning.

Brookfield (1990) was one of the first authors to critically explore aspects related to trust such as authenticity as well as the role of trust amongst students, teachers, and learning. Many other studies have followed; notably Corrigan and Chapman (2008) identified trust as a “motivating element to learning,” Chapman Walsh (2006) wrote about trust as an essential leadership quality for students, Jackson (1994) listed trust as one of seven strategies to support a culturally sensitive pedagogy, and from her perspective as a master teacher, Clunis D’Andrea (2013) examined how and why trust is connected to learning.

Michael’s poem, “I Think Students Are Heroic,” illustrates one aspect of trust not commonly addressed in the literature, that is, how trust is connected to the ways a teacher shares admiration for students. This admiration may be connected to the notion of academic hospitality or “letting others know they matter as fellow inquirers” (Bennett, 2003, p. 48; Larson, 2009). George Eliot once famously said, “Those who trust us educate us.”

### **I Think Students Are Heroic**

I convey to students  
    that I really like them.  
I like being with them,  
I like this age group a lot.  
I'm just absolutely intrigued  
    by their development  
    and what they are going through.  
I think they are heroic;  
    all the stuff they have to put up with.  
    With school as well as everything else.

So I have a lot of admiration for them  
    and I convey that to them.

I tell students  
    on the first day of class  
    that the only difference  
    between them and me  
    Is not that I'm smarter.  
        *It's that I've been at this longer.*

And I tell them if they've been at this  
as long as I have,  
they'll know at least as much as I do  
and probably more.

I tell them what we have here  
are my efforts  
to show you...  
how I learned this stuff  
and why I think it's really exciting and a lot of fun.

I try to erase the idea  
that this is about  
my being smarter than they are  
because I don't believe it is actually.  
Or, that I am there  
as some sort of an authority figure.  
My authority is based on  
my spending time with this discipline that I really like.

I try to get to know  
every single person's name.  
I take pictures  
and I have done that for quite a while.  
I know it makes a huge difference  
when you can call someone by his or her name.  
And I have them call me whatever they want,  
But they gotta choose:  
if they want to call me Prof. X. they can;  
if they want to call me by my first name they can.

I want to erase anything that sets me apart from them.

In the educational research, there are few studies that focus on trust as an emotional journey. Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, and Norman (2010) suggest that teachers need to recognize students as social and emotional beings as these dimensions interact to influence learning and performance over time. Poetry is often used to investigate and/or deepen our understandings of a subject of research (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009; Leavy, 2009). As a form of narrative, poetry is well suited to expressing the emotion, whether joy, sadness, enthusiasm, or disappointment of lived experiences (Wells, 2004). It is also ideally suited for teaching "another person how it is to feel something" (McCulliss, 2013, p. 91). To further illustrate this concept, Langer (1953) writes: "The poet's business is to create the appearance of 'experiences,' the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life" (p. 212). In essence, it is not only the experience, but also the transformation (i.e., what is learned over time) that matters. In "Life After School: What the Teacher Learned," Jane Tompkins (1996) writes:

Human beings, no matter what their background, need to feel they are safe in order to open themselves to transformation. They need to feel a connection between a given subject matter and who they are in order for knowledge to

take root. That security and connectedness are seldom present in a classroom that recognizes the students' cognitive capacities alone. People often assume that attention to the emotional lives of students, to their spiritual yearnings and their imaginative energies, will somehow inhibit the intellect's free play, drown it in a wash of sentiment, or deflect it into realms of fantasy and escape, that the critical and analytical faculties will be muffled, reined in, or blunted as a result. I believe the reverse is true. (p. 213)

As she begins her academic career Megan's poem, "Trusting Others," offers her emotional portrait of trust; the poem offers reflections over the past, present, and future tenses that demonstrate that learning to build trust is a journey that occurs over time. Michael's poem paints another vivid emotional portrait of trust as he looks back on his career in the poem, "What Music Do You March To?"

### **Trusting Others**

I don't think it happens automatically with a snap of the fingers.  
I think you have to work to create an atmosphere  
where students learn to trust their peers  
and faculty learn to trust each other.

*You can't just wiggle your nose and it's done.*

You have to earn it  
and work for it,  
especially in a first year classroom.

With my first-years  
I did think-pair-shares and lots of group assignments.  
These groupings were intended to foster critical thinking,  
make my students think outside their comfort zones,  
consider alternative point of views,  
and play devil's advocate.

But there isn't always trust between students.  
Sometimes they have more trust in the system  
or in their prof or textbook or whatever the content may be.

*Students need to know they can trust themselves and the teacher and each other.*

I let my students know up front  
what I was hoping they would get from the activities.  
Some students really ran with it and loved it  
and for other students it was a challenge.

Some students didn't care what their peers had to say,  
they simply wanted to know what they needed to pass this class  
or get a good mark.

### **What Music Do You March To?**

I think the system is absolutely haywire,  
relative to students.  
I've felt that since the day I stepped in here.

In fact, when I got ready to leave the first time,  
one of my friends reamed me out.  
He said to me,  
what makes you think you are the only one in step?  
I said, actually I don't think I'm in step.  
I can't hear the music anymore.  
I have no idea what music we are marching to;  
I just know that what I am doing doesn't fit here.

Over time I figured out ways  
to get rid of some of the stupid stuff.  
There are strategies I use  
that may not be common  
in other classrooms,  
such as not having a deadline for essays.

I looked at other faculty  
and said, why the hell are you doing this?  
I never felt defensive about my methods;  
I thought other faculty should be defensive instead.

I wasn't trying to teach students time management.  
I wasn't trying to be their parent.  
If my colleagues wanted students to grow up and meet deadlines,  
well they could go get their own kids.

The next set of poems, including "Reducing Risk," "Being Unaccountable," "Moral Courage," and "Lose the Competition" explore the theme of risk-taking and the impact that trust can have on collegiality, learning, and academic culture. A successful learning environment is created when students are able to trust their teachers as well as the people and policies that influence and guide their work within the university or outside of it. Brookfield (1990) writes:

Trust between teachers is the affective glue binding educational relationships together. Not trusting teachers has several consequences for students. They are unwilling to submit themselves to the perilous uncertainties of new

learning. They avoid risk. They keep their most deeply felt concerns private. They view with cynical reserve the exhortations and instructions of teachers. The more profound and meaningful the learning is to students, the more they need to be able to trust their teachers (p. 168).

In turn, teachers must be able to trust their peers and fellow administrators to be able to grow and develop in their roles as teachers over time. An analogy might be to draw upon the image when lobsters shed their hard exoskeleton, becoming vulnerable to the external environment (e.g., predators), in order to grow. In order to trust, we must, as Brookfield (1990) outlines, be willing to submit ourselves to risk. And in so doing, teachers and students must grow and learn to trust themselves and their peers as well as each other. A great piece of advice offered by one of our research participants was this:

The golden rule of learning: Do not ask students to take risks in your class that you as a teacher do not also take in front of them. Do not ask students to trust you as a teacher in ways you do not also trust them as students... Trust is reciprocal; it is paradoxical- you have to give it to receive it. You receive it in order to be able to give it" (anonymous participant, personal communication, 2010).

### **Reducing Risk**

The day I leveled authority in my class  
is the day I realized  
My students feel risk in here every single day.

I'd been through feeling that risk  
I never wanted to feel  
that way again as long as I lived.

I tried to take power out of the equation  
let authority come from influence  
not power over.

I began understanding learning differently  
seeing it as a mutually constructed process  
rather than a one-way information model.

A lot of things began to change for me  
But what changed most  
was the paradigm I was looking through.  
I didn't know that...  
until years later.  
It was the way I thought about  
what I was doing.

I had to be trustworthy  
    for my students and for me.  
Everything that we did  
    had to be out in the open  
    so students were protected.

### **Being Unaccountable**

David Suzuki once said  
    only two organisms on the planet require growth to survive  
    human beings and cancer cells.

Do universities have it wrong by trying to grow?  
    We can get 100% retention on campus.  
    All we need is a great big role of duct tape.

The kind of growth we want is intellectual growth...  
a growth in influence.

But the kind of growth we are experiencing  
is growth in the classroom population.  
    There is no time for reflection,  
    for more depth in the kinds of growth  
    that we want on campus and externally.

We have fewer programs now, but more students.  
An awful lot of the growth that we've seen  
    is in the administration of things on campus.

That's not inherently a bad thing;  
    administrators are all doing good work.  
What concerns me is that so much of the new administrative growth  
    is around making people more accountable.

What happens if we just adopted the policy of getting smaller  
    instead of getting larger?  
What would happen if we adopted the policy of being unaccountable?  
What if tenure and promotion was based on years of service?  
What if you were given the moral responsibility to create knowledge  
    and teach well  
    and do public service  
    and then trusted to do your best?

Would we have people who stop working hard?

What I mostly see is people  
working their fingers to the bone  
just like everywhere.  
People who love their disciplines,  
who love what they are doing so much  
they would do it regardless of the expectations  
placed upon them by the institution.

The poem “Being Unaccountable” suggests that teachers are equally as vulnerable as students when taking risks, particularly when their values differ from those of their peers, administrators, or academic norms and values. In “A Pedagogy of Trust in Higher Learning,” Curzon-Hobson (2002) discusses the culture of trust in higher learning and related pedagogical challenges. She argues that indifference to trust within the university is undesirable, and therefore needs to be better understood. Other authors such as Palmer (1993) have acknowledged that the mainstream culture of academia is less than ideally suited for the development of trust and collegiality:

Everywhere I go, I meet faculty who feel disconnected from their colleagues, from their students, and from their own hearts. Most of us go into teaching not for fame or fortune but because of a passion to connect. We feel deep kinship with some subject; we want to work in community with colleagues who share our values and our vocation. But when institutional conditions create more combat than community, when the life of the mind alienates more than it connects, the heart goes out of things, and there is little left to sustain us (p. x).

Similarly, Mary Rose O’Reilley (1998) writes:

Attention: deep listening. People are dying in spirit for lack of it. In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counter-argument. We critique the student’s or colleague’s idea; we mentally grade and pigeon-hole each other. In society at large, people often listen with an agenda. Seldom is there a deep, open-hearted, unjudging perception of the other. And so we all talk louder and more stridently and with a terrible desperation. By contrast, if someone truly listens to me, my spirit begins to expand (p.19).

Studies that deeply examine the inner lives of academics (Larsen, 2002) or draw attention to its harsh realities are important to exploring what academic life truly looks and feels like. Similarly, the poem “Moral Courage” describes what trust looks and feels like to one educator. This poem speaks to the intrinsic courage, risk, and integrity required of teachers when standing up and advocating for students with lesser power and authority. In examining the relationship between trust and risk-taking, Curzon-Hobson (2002) writes:



Trust is a fundamental element in the pursuit of higher learning for it is only through a sense of trust that students will embrace an empowering sense of freedom, and the exercise of this freedom requires a risk on behalf of students and their teacher” (p. 266).

Michael’s poem, “Lose the Competition,” looks at trust through another lens, providing insights on how trust between students and teachers may be undermined, given an emphasis on academic policies and competition. Trust within the more general academic culture may be affected when deeply ingrained institutional policies run counter to developing or fostering trust (Simons, 2002). In the words of Warren E. Buffett, “Trust is like the air we breathe. When it’s present, no one really notices. But when it’s absent, everyone notices.”

### **Moral Courage**

Building trust is building assumed authority.  
Imposing your own authority over others  
    undermines authority and erodes trust.  
People trust you to be somebody  
    who is worth listening to,  
    who has an opinion,  
    who is a welcome participant,  
    who does not impose their own authority on the group.

When students entrust you with authority  
    they trust you to protect them.  
Knowing there is somebody there to protect you is a natural symbiotic relationship.

Building trust requires moral courage.  
    Take the heat.  
    Be willing to take responsibility for problems that other people have created.  
    Play that kind of protective role.  
    Be that first line of defense.  
Take that punch full in the face,  
    and don’t allow outside issues to intrude in the classroom.

Welcome a level of trust that's profoundly different.

I accept the authority,  
    but I don't accept the power.  
Reduce your control.  
Reduce the power.  
    Try very deliberately not to impose decisions.  
    Open conversations around things for others to make their own decisions.  
    Negotiate whatever needs attention.

I trust my students to  
    act professionally.  
    do a good job.  
    go the extra mile.  
My students trust me to set up the circumstances of learning,  
    in a way that allows them to do all those things and not interfere with them.

One of the things we can all do to build trust is  
    publicly applaud people for the things they do.  
Go out and find the unsung heroes.  
Those people who invested so heavily in teaching that they hurt their publishing career.  
Those people who are slaving away and never get any recognition,  
    yet somebody noticed.  
They can then trust their institution to notice that they are making important  
contributions.  
    It creates a culture of trust.

### **Lose the Competition**

I don't think that students come to class  
with a predisposition  
    this course,  
    this classroom,  
    this professor  
        is *trustworthy*.

So trust has to be actually built.  
And I think one of the ways is  
    you gotta limit power,  
    your own power.

I never had a penalty for late papers.  
I had some pretty big fights over that,  
    not with my students,  
    but with other professors.  
I asked what are we trying to teach students  
by this penalty for late papers?  
    It's for your convenience not theirs.

I'm not prepared to buy that bullshit.  
You are trying to promote fairness and all that...  
    It's not fair.  
    Life is not like that.  
    Sure we have deadlines to meet,  
but we know the deadline  
is arbitrary or of some value.

I think that marking on the curve  
or marking in relationship to other people's work  
is a mistake.  
This is about them individually  
each student.

If you create competition in the classroom  
you've destroyed trust big time.

In our final re-presented poem, "Being Authentic," James explores an important, often unexpressed aspect of trust. His poem suggests that trusting yourself might be equally as important as knowing yourself and being true to who you really are. When self-trust is absent, fear may come into play in the classroom and teachers may find it more challenging to interact or bond with their students. Clunis D'Andrea (2013) and others point out that trust is fundamentally linked to empathy (Cannon Poindexter, 2002; Eisner, 1997; Faulkner, 2007; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006) and in strengthening the teacher-student bond:

With trust in place, teacher and student can recognize and explore the existence of the self in the learning process- a critical step in the formation of a strong relationship. These strong relationships are the foundation of teacher-student bonding. (Clunis D'Andrea, p. 86).

### **Being Authentic**

There was a point in my career  
when I don't know what happened.

I don't know what produced it,  
but I had a fear response  
unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

I can liken it only to stage fright—  
a time when I became afraid to teach.

I was afraid to go in front of a classroom.

And this was 15 years, with reasonable success,  
into teaching at the university.

It wasn't that the students were being mean to me  
and I started questioning my ability.  
Everything was going along the same way it always had.

I still don't know what happened,  
but I fought my way through it.

I literally had to force myself to go into classrooms.

Eventually it passed.

I think what was happening is

I started to question the worth of what I was teaching.

The value of it.

It shifted two things...

the kind of content

I was addressing in my classrooms,

because I was teaching about teaching

but I felt like I wasn't teaching good stuff after a while.

I felt like I was teaching the stuff I was supposed to teach

instead of the stuff I felt I should.

There was a point where I made the turn

to becoming a professor

instead of just somebody who was showing up and doing the job.

I became a professor instead of an instructor.

And a professor professes!

You find the things that are important to you

and you try to make them

an important feature of what you teach.

And I think I did that.

And that probably helped a great deal.

To tell you the truth,

I don't know that my students ever noticed the difference.

I hope they might have.

I think it was a natural outgrowth of that to say

I would be as authentic as I possibly could in every interaction.

## **Conclusions**

In sharing these poems, our hope is that readers will reflect on how they themselves, as teachers, administrators, students or stakeholders can work towards building trusting relationships and/or a culture of trust within their home institutions. Although the purpose of our study was to share and discuss lived experiences of trust, we do acknowledge that the themes arising from the re-presented poems may not represent every unique interpretation, permutation, or story.

Poetry is a profound narrative tool (Wells, 2004) that is ideally situated for expanding the horizons of educational research. First, it offers possibilities for researchers to “stretch our capacities for creativity and knowing” (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009, p. 25). For instance, what other types of relational pedagogies or educational topics might be creatively explored through the lens of poetry? What other insights or unexpected connections could lead to deeper insights and connections, about others or ourselves?

Poetry is also an excellent medium for reflecting on thoughts, feelings, experiences, and emotions (Faulkner, 2007; Leavy, 2009). Leavy (2009) writes, “Poems can create a vivid and sensory scene that compels the reader, teaching him or her something about a particular aspect of social experience” (p. 68). Educators are often taught they should be self-reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983); thus researchers and teachers could use poetry to more fully engage in the practice of self-reflection. Perhaps the most significant advantage of poetic transcription is that it brings meaningful, rich, lived experiences of research participants to life. The representation of research data into a poetic form honors the voice of participants as co-collaborators of research in which their “lived experiences” take center stage (Richardson, 1992).

Sparkes, Nilges, Swan, and Downing (2003) describe several advantages of poetic re-presentation for the researcher. From our point of view, the single most important advantage was that research poetry provided us with an innovative form in which to explore lived experiences of trust. In addition, poetry could be used in other ways in education to spark a dialogue between researchers and the community or to enhance collegiality through conversation (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). For example, in “The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal,” Palmer and Zajonc (2010) describe an undertaking at Prince George’s Community College in Hyattsville, Maryland in which poetry is used as a catalyst to evoke meaningful conversation and connection amongst isolated faculty.

Carr (2003) writes, “The main goal of the experimental text is to evoke the reader’s emotional response and produce a shared experience” (p. 1330). As teachers, students, administrators, or stakeholders we invite you to reflect upon and share your experiences of trust with one another. As educational researchers we hope you will embrace methods of qualitative research such as poetic re-presentations that are “profoundly different.” Take a risk, to grow and learn to trust yourselves as well as others and perhaps, to talk a little more about things like “trust” within education.

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